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Ideas for Law Students and Recent Graduates Entering the Real World

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It is no secret that the recession has adversely impacted the employment market for lawyers and effected structural changes in the delivery of legal services. While data suggests that demand for legal services continues to rise, the demand for law firm services, particularly at large firms, is stagnant at best. As a result, large law firms no longer hire large numbers of lawyers on a regular and predictable schedule. Bringing on a new lawyer is expensive, and employers are no longer willing to hire in large numbers and then wait to see who “works out.”

These structural changes have directly impacted the job search process. Employment opportunities are more dispersed and correspondingly harder to find, and hiring is more likely to be particularized, with employers less likely to be looking for a generic first year associate and more likely to be looking for someone to do a specific job. This puts a premium on job seekers’ ability to identify the diffuse opportunities and communicate effectively that they have the interest, skills, ability, and knowledge to do that particular job. Successful applicants frequently need to do more than merely assert an interest — they need to demonstrate it through courses or clinical placements, or participation in pro bono work, writing competitions, student organizations, or professional associations, including non-legal ones.

Job seekers must harness all possible sources of information about openings and cannot rely solely on published job postings. This is one of the many reasons “networking” is so important. I know students tire of being told to do this, but there is no substitute for talking to people and building relationships. Many jobs are never posted officially or when they are, there already is someone who knows about the job and has a head start on securing it. Go to the local bar meetings. Take advantage of CLE programs in practice areas of interest to you. If you have an internship, don’t just “do your job,” spend a little time with the lawyers you work with to under-

stand what they do, how they got where they are and who else they know whom you might want to meet. Networking is not just about getting job leads. Law students should spend time learning about the world of practice. You will be far more likely to persuade an employer that you have the necessary skills and knowledge if you understand what is required. Talk to as many lawyers as you can to find out what they do and about the essential skills of their jobs. Then, ask yourself whether that is something you would enjoy and something at which you could excel.

If you want to enter the world of legal practice, you should be knowledgeable about that world and the forces impacting it. Therefore you should regularly read a national newspaper as well as the local paper and bar journal of the region in which you hope to practice. Today’s headlines will provide insight into the future growth or decline of particular practice areas. Follow developments in your areas of interest. If you have not narrowed your practice focus, follow general publications such as the *National Law Journal* or *BNA Law Week*.

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Finally, it is important to bring the right mindset to the process. Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn, has argued that no matter what your field of interest you need to think and act like you’re running a start-up company. As he explains, no matter your profession, “Today you need to think of yourself as an entrepreneur at the helm of at least one living, growing start-up venture: your career.”¹

1 Reid Hoffman, *The Start-Up of You* (2012).



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